

I am a life long practicing Catholic and member of Our Lady of Lourdes catholic parish in Perth. I received a letter from Archbishop Timothy Costello this week which encouraged me to make a submission regarding the Inquiry into the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019. I feel compelled to add my support for the proposed amendment which states-
“Section 124BA. Provisions for ministers of religion.

(1) In this section –

religious confession means a confession made by a person to a minister of religion in the minister’s capacity as a minister or religion in accordance with the tenets of the minister’s faith or religion.

(2) For the purposes of section 124B(1)(c)(i), a minister of religion who forms a belief on the basis of information disclosed to the minister in the minister’s capacity as a minister of religion is taken to form the belief in the course of the minister’s work.

(3) A minister of religion is not excused from criminal responsibility for an offence under section 124B(1) on the grounds that –

a. the minister’s belief is based on information disclosed to the minister during a religious confession; or

b. disclosure of the minister’s belief or information on which the belief is based is otherwise contrary to the tenets of the minister’s faith or religion.”

Despite the appeal by the Archbishop, I believe that any information disclosed to a priest during the course of Confession which leads the priest to believe that a minor is being sexually abused MUST be reported to the authorities, irrespective of the wishes of the penitent. Failure to do so SHOULD BE a criminal offence under the proposed amendment. I believe that the Seal of the Confessional is NOT more important than the protection of children. While the catholic hush has made some progress towards improving the safeguarding of children and young people, I feel alot more work needs to be done and this bill will help.

I support the proposed bill and wish the committee every success with the inquiry.